



GIVA

GIVA, a traditional footwear in Persia, mainly consisting of an upper part made of twined white cotton thread sewn up on the edges of a cloth and leather or rubber sole ([PLATE I](#)).

Nothing can be found about the precedents of the *giva*-making craft (*giva-duzi/-bāfi*) in Persia in available sources. The earliest known mention of the word *giva* is probably that in the *Širāz-nāma* (comp. ca. 734/1333) of Abu'l-'Abbās Zarkub Širāzi, where (pp. 127, 155) he mentions the “*bāzār-e giva-duzān*” (*giva*-makers’ market) as well-known in Shiraz. Another early reference to *giva* is found in the *Resāla-ye delgošā* by the satirical author ‘Obayd Zākāni (d. ca. 772/1370), where he mentions (p. 62) the anecdote of a dervish performing his ritual prayer (*namāz*) with his *givas* on lest these be stolen. The word is recorded in much later Persian dictionaries such as Moḥammad-Qāsem Soruri’s *Majma’ al-fors* (comp. 1008/1599-1600; III, p. 1233: “a kind of cloth shoe”) and ‘Abd-al-Rašid Tattavi’s *Farhang-e rašidi* (comp. 1064/ 1653-54; II, p. 1267: “a kind of woolen footwear”).

Producing a pair of *givas*, done only by hand, is a complicated, time-consuming job. For instance, making a single average-sized upper takes nearly two days (Wulff, *Crafts*, pp. 228-29). At least three persons are involved in the commercial production of a pair of *givas*. Knitting the uppers (*ruya*; vernacular variants: *rua*, *ruvār*, etc.) in a kind of “blanket stitch” is a woman’s work, done at home with strong twined cotton thread, using a special needle about 11.5 cm long ([PLATE II](#)). Sometimes a triangular tip cap (*piš-panja*), knitted separately, is sewn onto the *ruya*’s tip (*panja*) to reinforce it ([PLATE III](#),



PLATE IV). Traditional soles (*takt*, *zira*, *šiva*), made by specialized craftsmen in sole-making (*takt-/šiva-kaši*) workshops, consist of strong white or black linen or cotton rags cut into strips usually 13 to 15 cm long and 4 cm wide, which are then folded to a width of 1 cm. The folded strips are first soaked in a solution of gum tragacanth (*katirā*), and beaten flat with a *mošta* (mallet without handle). About ninety such folded strips are needed for a single sole. Then the sole-maker pierces up to six holes longitudinally in the bundle of compressed strips with a special hot awl. Next, from cowhide tanned in lime he cuts a long narrow strip which he passes through the holes to keep the cloth strips tightly pressed together. The bundle is then trimmed edgewise with a sharp knife to fit different foot soles. The tip (*puza*, *damāga*) and the counter (*pāšna*, *na'leki*, etc.) are further reinforced with two pieces of strong hide. Leather soles are sometimes made, and since nearly five decades ago rubber soles, cut out of flat pieces of discarded tires, are used for producing much cheaper *givas*. The soles of a pair, being identical, can suit either the right or left foot.

The job of the third worker involved in the craft, the actual *giva*-maker (*givaduz/kaš*), is to assemble the uppers and soles which he buys from the preceding workers. In his specialized workshop, he sews the upper onto the edge of the sole with thread and a strip of bleached cowhide, molds the pairs, and presents them for sale.

Materials for traditional *giva-duzi* are almost the same in Persia. However, local differences in the quality of components or in the shape and ornamentation of *givas* do exist. For example, the *maleki* (lit., “royal, worthy of kings;” an appellation probably dating from the Qajar period), a better kind of *giva*, has a pointed upturned *panja*, strengthened, like the *pāšna*, with triangular leather toecaps and counters. The *givas* made in Kermānšāh (locally called *kalāš*), one of the best varieties in the country, have soles of thick cowhide (or rubber) and uppers with broad tips. The best Ābāda *givas* have uppers embellished with geometrical patterns created by “small holes left in the course of stitching” (Wulff, *Crafts*, p. 229; for a detailed description of the technique and terminology of *giva*-making see *ibid.*, pp. 228-30).

Givas were a relatively inexpensive comfortable footwear used mainly by tribal people, villagers, or poor city people (cf. the Eṣfahāni expression *giva-pā* “wearing *givas*” referring to such people; Jamālzāda, s.v.), especially in dry areas or in hot and dry months. The main *giva*-making centers were Ābāda, Kermānšāh, Sanandaj, Kāšān, Se-Deh (now called Komeyni-šahr) and Šahrežā (near Isfahan), Borujerd, Qom, Yazd, and some towns in Khorasan, with Ābāda



and Kermānšāh *givas* being considered the best.

The use of *givas* has been steadily declining in the last half-century, especially in cities, due to several factors. In 1328 Š./1949 the government forbade the wearing of *givas* by government employees, who were required to wear European-style leather shoes. Starting in 1336 Š./1957, mass-production of leather or leatherette footwear, differently made for men and women, and sold at reasonably low prices accessible to the masses, dealt a severe blow to the humble *giva*-making local industries, which, based on a primitive technique, could not compete with the influx of a great variety of mass-produced footwear for different seasons and sexes (*givas* were unisex). In 1336 Š./1957 a pair of machine-made shoes sold for about 200 rials, and a pair of good *givas* for about 600 rials. Therefore, *giva*-makers gradually abandoned their craft, and turned to other jobs. Nowadays there remain about five *giva*-making workshops in the centers of the craft. At present (1995), a pair of Ābāda *givas* costs about 80,000 rials, that is, about four or five times as much as a pair of mass-produced shoes of inferior quality. This writer believes that this manual craft will be totally abandoned in the next three decades. For the time being, *givas* with thick or thin soles continue to be made; those with thick rubber soles are mostly worn by shepherds, and the other kind mostly by city-dwellers fond of walking as an exercise.

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